PAPERS

Relating to the Works at Sheerness Dock Yard.

Ordered, by The House of Commons, *to be Printed,* 16 *March* 1826.

Admiralty Office, 15th March 1826.

Copy of a LETTER from the Navy Board to *John Wilson Croker*, Esq. dated the 14th March 1826, with Four Enclosures, and accompanied by Three Charts, relating to Sheerness Dock Yard.

Navy Office, 14 March 1826.

SIR,

IN compliance with the directions of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, signified in Mr. Barrow's letter of the 27th ultimo, we called upon Messrs. Rennie to report the progress of the works at Sheerness, which commenced under the superintendence of the late Mr. Rennie, and have since his death been conducted under those gentlemen ; and, as pointed out by their Lordships, we also directed Three Drawings to be prepared, the *first* descriptive of the Yard before its present improvement and repair were undertaken, and when it had no proper security against the violence of the sea in blowing weather and high tides, from which the Dock Yard had often suffered to an alarming extent, so as to occasion a frequent expenditure of large sums of money for its temporary and imperfect security.

See annexed Extracts.

The *second* drawing describes the improvements proposed by the late Mr. Rennie, and is that part which has been executed as stated in the accompanying Report from Messrs. Rennie, for the sum of £.1,114,715.

The *third* drawing comprehends the whole of the repairs and improvements both in the departments of the civil engineer and architect, as finally decided upon, and now in progress under a contract with Messrs. Jolliffe, Banks and Nicholson, dated the 1st January 1825, whereby they agree to complete every part of the work for the sum of £. 864,101, leaving it exclusively to the opinion and judgment of our own engineers whether the works are executed in a proper, workmanlike, substantial manner, and binding themselves to make good any damage or failure which may be discovered in the course of one year from the date of the certificate of our engineers as to the good performance of the work.

By this contract the Public are exempt from any claim beyond the stipulated sum of £. 864,101, and thereby guard against the large expense to which they were before exposed from accidents and unforeseen difficulties in the execution of works of such extreme risk, a large portion of which is carried on in very deep water, in a situation much exposed to the violence of the sea and wind.

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Although the contract was not dated until the 1st January 1825, the negociation, agreement and preparation for its commencement took place the beginning of 1824, and it was in consequence of the extreme low price of every material necessary for the execution of such works, that it first occurred as likely to be profitable to the Public to contract at once for all the works, rather than pursue the accustomed course, namely, that of contracting from time to time for different parts of the work, at a rate of expenditure not exceeding £. 50,000 per annum; so that sixteen years would have been necessary for the completion of the plans, in which time the works already executed would have been exposed to danger from leaving the foundations so long in an unfinished state.

See annexed Report from the Architect.

Contrasting the original estimates of the late experienced engineer with the sum agreed to be paid to the Contractors, Messrs. Rennie state that the difference is £. 92,501 in favour of the Public, and in the department of the architect the difference is £. 62,550, making a total of £. 155,051.

This is stated in order to show the expediency of contracting at a moment when the price of every thing had fallen so low, though no doubt the Contractors, having the advantage of entering upon so large a concern, felt that they could propose lower terms than if brought into competition for mere detached parts of the work.

After the Contractors had offered to complete the works for the sum of £. 135,051 less than the original estimates, of the amount of which they were kept in perfect ignorance, it was thought that the Public had a right to some further benefit, on account of the Contractors not being met by any competition, and after considerable delay and objections on their part, they acceded to the further condition that £. 20,000 should be struck off from their prices, and this sum is included in the £. 155,051 mentioned in the preceding part of this letter.

Since the contract has been in operation, the price of iron and other materials rose to a degree that would have occasioned very great increase of expense, if we had not entered into the contract in question; and we have the pleasure to add, that the public obtained this advantage without any prejudice to the Contractors, who had taken the precaution to provide their materials before the prices advanced.

The manner in which the Contractors had executed the work of the Great Basin, under the late Mr. Rennie, pointed them out as secure and safe persons to be intrusted with the important and dangerous task of completing the works in still deeper water and a more exposed situation; and we may confidently assert, that it is no unimportant gain to the Public to have such works in the hands of persons whose skill and fidelity in the discharge of their contract does them the highest credit, and promises not less advantage from the solidity of the works than the economy with which they are executed.

We are, &c.

(signed) *T. B. Martin.*
R. Seppings.
H. Legge.

J. W. Croker, Esq.

ENCLOSURES.

Enclosure N° 1.—Extract of a Letter from Commissioner Brown, dated Sheerness, 17th January 1808.

"I hope some speedy measures will be taken for the security of this Yard; another high tide, accompanied by a heavy gale, would, in my opinion, destroy the greatest part of the wharfs, and I should not be surprised if it reached the buildings, for it is visibly perceptible in some places that the foundation has given way considerably."

Enclosure N° 2.—Extract of a Letter from the Officers of Sheerness Yard, dated 17th January 1808.

"We have to lament the damage this Yard and the landing-place in the garrison has sustained, in consequence of a heavy gale of wind from the northward, on the night of the 14th and morning of the 15th instant, accompanied by a very high tide, which has forced the new pier, and washed the ground from the inside of the wharfs near the Mould Loft and Launching Slips, Anchor Wharf, Old Pier Head, head of Graving Place, Pitch House, and near the south end of the Rigging House."

Enclosure, N° 3.—Copy of Messrs. George and John Rennie's Report, dated the 10th March 1826.

Honourable Sirs,

IN consequence of your honourable Board's directions of the 20th ultimo, we herewith beg leave to transmit an Historical Statement of the origin and progress of the works now carrying on at Sheerness.

In the year 1812, the importance of Sheerness for refitting ships of war (being advantageously situated at the confluence of the Thames and Medway,) having been fully recognized, after much anxious investigation during many years, it was determined to enlarge, improve and repair the old Dock Yard, which was in such a state of dilapidation as to be entirely useless; while the importance of the position as a naval station, and the advantage of a greater depth of water than any other port, rendered it a matter of urgent importance to place it in such an effective state as to secure to the Public all the benefit of its local advantages.

The late Mr. Rennie was accordingly directed, on the 13th of January 1813, to prepare plans, estimates and specifications for so much of the intended improvement as related to the south end of the Dock Yard.

This was accordingly done, and the Plan, No. 2, which accompanies this Report, was prepared; and for the better understanding the alterations therein proposed, the Plan, No. 1, is sent, on which the Dock Yard is shown as it was prior to the commencement of any part of the present works.

The Plan, No. 2, consisted of a sea boundary wall, 2,150 feet long, extending as far as the old entrance to Powder Monkey Bay, including the great basin, three dry docks (with their accompanying steam engines,) for 74-gun ships, a mast pond and tunnel, the foundations of working, store, mast and boat-houses, and slip; the Estimate for the whole of these works amounted to the sum of £.991,857.

It was at first determined to have only one dry dock, leaving the remainder until wanted. Considering, however, the increasing demands of the public service, and the abandonment, or at least suspension, of the proposed works at Northfleet, and the economy resulting from carrying on at once the whole of the works ultimately contemplated in this part of the Dock Yard at Sheerness, it was

determined to construct the three dry docks together, and to make them large enough to receive vessels of 120 guns instead of 74 guns, by which means an ultimate saving would be effected, and great advantage obtained. This created an addition to the Estimate of £.135,000, being a total estimate of £.1,126,857.

The whole of these works were successively completed and opened for the public service on the 5th September 1823, and the actual sum expended upon them amounts to £.1,114,715, which is £.12,142 less than the original estimate of the late Mr. Rennie.

On the completion of the works above-mentioned, it became absolutely necessary to repair and improve the remainder of the old Dock Yard, which had now become perfectly unfit for naval purposes, and would from its dilapidated and imperfect condition have endangered the works already executed by rendering it liable to the eruption of water under its foundations; and to obviate this it was deemed necessary to execute the whole of the river front of the Yard with one connected solid foundation, in order to render the whole complete and secure.

In consequence, in the year 1821, the late Mr. Rennie received directions to prepare plans, estimates and specifications for this purpose.

This Plan consisted of a lesser basin for stores, landing stairs, boat and ordnance basin, one frigate dock, a graving and building slip, and surface drains and sea wall as far as the Garrison Point.

The Estimate for these works amounted to £.631,838.

In this Estimate was included £.68,000 for the small basin for landing stores at the Powder Monkey Bay, which is not included in the present contracts. Subsequently, however, to the above estimate, several additions have been made, in consequence of improving and enlarging the boat and ordnance basins, the building slip, and founding the sea wall in front of the mud dock by coffer dams instead of diving bells (which will be the means of saving much time and performing the work much better), so that the aggregate estimate of the late Mr. Rennie, including these alterations and additions, will amount to £.635,638, after deducting £.68,000 for the lesser basin above stated.

These works are described on Plan N° 3, coloured *red*, and will complete the whole of the contemplated repairs and improvements in this part of the Yard, which were only decided upon after mature deliberation and frequent discussions on the spot.

In the year 1824, Messrs. Jolliffe, Banks and Nicholson entered into a contract with the Navy Board to complete the whole of these works for the sum of £.543,137, in four years and a half, which is £.92,501 less than the original estimate of the late Mr. Rennie, and the contractors are bound under a penalty of £.200,000 to complete the work in the most perfect manner for the sum stated in the printed estimate, they taking upon themselves all the risks attending so hazardous a work.

They are now in progress, and up to the present date the lesser basin and 300 feet of the sea wall, beyond the north side of Powder Monkey Bay, about half the floor and inverted arch of the frigate dock, half the building slip, and about one third of the piling of the graving slip, and the whole of the great coffer dam, have been completed as far as the Garrison Point; so that the whole of the works in contemplation at this Dock Yard are now in progress, and will, it is confidently expected, be finished in about three years from the present time. The sea wall, which is the most difficult part of the work, and attended with the greatest risk in the execution, will probably be completed about the beginning of September 1827.

Every exertion is now making to finish these works with as much expedition as possible; and from the success which has hitherto attended the whole of the operations, there is every reason to look forward with confidence to an equally successful termination. Sheerness Dock Yard will then form one of the most complete naval establishments in the kingdom; and the increased expedition and economy with which ships of war will be equipped and refitted for sea, will fully repay the expense and labour which have been employed in constructing it.

If

If the plan for a great naval arsenal at Northfleet had been carried into effect, it is not probable that it would have been deemed necessary to do more at Sheerness than to rebuild and restore the old portion of the Yard, and to construct a basin for the refitting of frigates and smaller vessels, which hitherto have been greatly retarded in their equipment, by the difficulty and frequent impossibility of communicating with them when at their moorings in the harbour. But without the Basin and Docks at Sheerness or Northfleet, it seems difficult to conceive in what way the large fleet now in the Medway could have been fitted for sea on any emergency, or even kept in a proper state of repair.

When the first portion of these works was completed in 1823, several of the line-of-battle ships in ordinary had not been docked for many years, though the whole of them, amounting to upwards of 20 sail, have been since docked, and thoroughly examined and repaired.

We have the honour to be, &c.

(signed) *Geo. & John Rennie.*

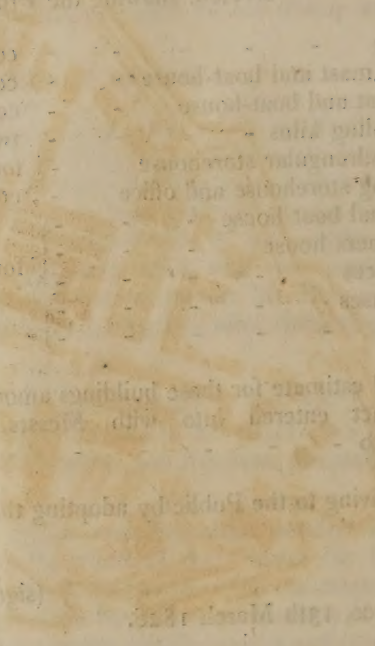
Enclosure N° 4.—Copy of Mr. Taylor's Report of the Buildings intended to be erected, showing the Progress made in each.

A smithery - - - - -	complete and in use.
A working mast and boat-house - -	complete.
A store mast and boat-house - -	complete up to the roof.
Three suppling kilns - - - -	two completed.
A large quadrangular storehouse -	foundations done up to ground line.
A victualling storehouse and office -	complete up to roof.
An additional boat-house - - -	foundations in hand, and rapidly advancing.
Commissioners house - - -	
Officers offices - - - -	
Officers houses - - - -	
Chapel - - - - - -	

	£.
The original estimate for these buildings amounted to - - -	373,514
The contract entered into with Messrs. Jolliffe and Banks, amounts to - - - - - - - - - - -	310,964
Saving to the Public by adopting the new contract - - £.	62,550

(signed) *Geo. L. Taylor.*

Navy Office, 13th March 1826.



Nº 1. — PLAN OF HIS MAJESTY'S DOCK YARD AT SHEERNESS,

as it existed in the Year 1813, previous to any alteration.

The Part coloured Brown, shews the boundary of the old Dock Yard, before the improvements.

London March 10th 1816. George & John Rennie.

James Basire sculp.
Luke Hansard & Sons, Printers.

164. *Ordered by The* HOUSE OF COMMONS, *to be Printed 16th March 1816*

Nº2. PLAN OF HIS MAJESTY'S DOCK YARD AT SHEERNESS.

shewing the improvements in the Southern part of the Yard as recommended by the late Mr Rennie in his report of March 1823. and coloured dark yellow.

London March 16th 1826. George & John Rennie

Ordered by The HOUSE of COMMONS to be Printed 6th March 1826

N°3. PLAN OF HIS MAJESTY'S DOCK YARD AT SHEERNESS.

shewing the whole of the alterations & improvements determined upon in the Year 1824.

1. Commiss.rs House and Office.
2. Officers Houses.
3. Chapel.
4. Commiss.rs Coach House, &c.
5. Entrance Gates.
6. Surgery and Civil Guard.
7. Military Guard.
8. Team Stables.
9. Navy Well.
10. Smithery.
11. Coal Yard and Iron Store.
12. Pitch House, and Stoving House.
13. Caulkers Cabin, Treenail &c.
14. Tap House.
15. Saw Mills, Mould loft &c.
16. Store House.
17. Rigging House, and Sail loft.
18. Foreman Shipwrights Store Cabin.
19. Suppling Boilers.
20. Tap and Capstan House.
21. Labourers Store Cabin.
22. Bricklayers Pound.
23. Steam Engine House.
24. Store, Mast, and Boat House.
25. Mast and Boat Pond.
26. Working Mast and Boat House.
27. Officers Offices.
28. Small Basin.
29. Dry Docks.
30. Graving Slip.
31. Mast makers Store Cabin.
32. Hoop heating House.
33. Building Slip.
34. Boat House.
35. Ordnance Basin and Gun Wharf.
36. Victualling Store House.
37. Great Basin.
38. Masting Sheers.
39. Tunnel to Mast Pond.
40. Culvert.
41. Boundary Wall.
42. Boat Basin.
43. Drains.

Note. A few of the Soundings are marked on front of the Yard, and are dated from Low water of Spring Tides.

London March 10th 1826. George & John Rennie.

James Basire sculp.

Duke Hansard & Sons, Printers.

164. Ordered by The HOUSE of COMMONS to be Printed 16th March 1826.